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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
UNDER GORBACHEV

by

Commander Howard Sidman

submitted to

Dr. Melvin A. Goodman

11 April 1989

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## INTRODUCTION

Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech was a logical follow-on to his evolving policy towards the region since becoming General-Secretary. In it he sought to downplay the military component of his Asian strategy in an attempt to gain the greater economic and political leverage denied his predecessors. Although he is anxious to achieve as many improvements with as many Asian nations as he can, the lack of substantial new proposals demonstrates that Gorbachev remains more capable of altering his style than the substance of Soviet Foreign Policy.

Gorbachev's predecessors did so badly in the region--pushing, threatening, sneering and spying while being unable to offer tangible economic benefits--that Gorbachev may make immediate headway by simply behaving normally. Beyond that, if successful domestic economic reforms generate Soviet trade with the region and if Gorbachev is able to prevail over forces that resist making substantial diplomatic concessions, further penetration into the region will become possible.

The Soviet leadership has realized that over the past decade, the Asian-Pacific region has greatly increased its importance to the world. Economically, U.S. trade with the Pacific surpassed its trade with Europe in 1980. In 1986, American-Pacific two-way trade was 215 billion, almost 50% more than U.S. trade with Europe.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Interview with James Lyons by Proceedings, 13.7 (July, 1987), p. 67.

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Today some 35% of U.S. trade is conducted in the Pacific.<sup>2</sup> Sixty percent of the world gross national product exists within the Asian-Pacific rim.<sup>3</sup> Moscow also believes that the Pacific will play a crucial role in deciding possible future political structure since the four major powers (Soviet Union, United States, China, Japan) are located there.<sup>4</sup> Strategically, Soviet fears are of becoming susceptible to the opening of a second front in a war with NATO and of growing vulnerable to increasing Sino-Japanese-American cooperation.<sup>5</sup> The Soviets will combine veiled and not-so-veiled threats with high-sounding proposals for arms control agreements in order to build public political pressures in the region against security cooperation with the U.S., and with a crucial goal of hobbling the U.S.'s influence in the regions. Of grave concern to the U.S. is the historical Soviet method of activating their foreign policy by a combination of threats and promises.

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<sup>2</sup> John Lehman, "Successful Naval Strategy in the Pacific: How We Are Achieving It, How We Can Afford It," Naval War College Review, 40.1 (Winter, 1987), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> James Lyons, "A Peacetime Strategy for the Pacific," Naval War College Review, 40.1 (Winter, 1987), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Jia Bei, "A Look at Gorbachev's Asia Pacific Policy," Beijing Review, 41 (12 October 1987), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Maritime Strategy in the Pacific: The Implications for NATO," Naval War College Review, 40.1 (Winter, 1987), pp. 8-18.

### SOVIET PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

In his July 1986 speech in Vladivostok, marking the presentation of the Order of Lenin to the city, Gorbachev made three significant points clearly indicating Soviet intent. One, the Soviet Union is an Asian and Pacific country. Two, the experiences of history, the laws of growing interdependence, and the integrational demands of economics, make us inclined to seek ways towards an accord setting up open links between states within the region and outside it. Three, there is a need for an urgent, radical break with traditions of Soviet political thinking on war, peace, defense, the security of specific states, and international security.

Gorbachev very specifically laid out nine goals for the Asian-Pacific region in the Vladivostok speech. Those goals are:

(1) Comprehensively strengthen friendship and step up diverse ties with the Mongolian People's Republic, the Democratic Republic of Korea, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and the People's Republic of Kampuchea;

(2) Extend ties with Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Brunei, Maldives Republic, all young and independent participants in the political life of the region;

(3) Create an atmosphere of good neighborliness with China by enhancing economic links, space exploration, and cultural and educational exchanges;

(4) Increase economic cooperation through joint enterprises,

and research and exploration of ocean resources;

(5) Mutually advantageous force reduction in the region with the United States;

(6) Normalizing PRC-SRV relations;

(7) Reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula;

(8) Reduce nuclear and conventional arms in Asia and the Pacific through a nuclear-free southern Indian Ocean and Korean Peninsula; and,

(9) Reduce naval activity in the Pacific.

This speech indicates that Moscow believes that China is the key to any successful Asian strategy. Stripped of conciliatory rhetoric, Gorbachev's speech in fact, offered very little. Concessions towards China at Vladivostok were only symbolic, at most, tactful. Furthermore, all Gorbachev seemed to be offering Japan, an irredeemable ally of the U.S. from his point of view, was an invitation to help remedy the ailing Soviet economy unhindered by the two countries' intractable territorial issue. At the same time, Vladivostok offered more evidence that Gorbachev is serious about domestic economic reforms. Vladivostok also suggested that while still putting forward vague and all-encompassing proposals that are considered either meaningless or deceptive, Gorbachev was beginning to address head-on specific problems and obstacles--as Beijing called them--in Moscow's international relations. He is thus making Soviet diplomatic

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performance susceptible to a test against commitments made.<sup>6</sup> 2

Two years later in Krasnoyarsk, Gorbachev relaunched his Asian diplomacy on September 16, 1988. He outlined again Moscow's new Pacific policy. His proposals are aimed at economic and tension (arms control) reduction goals. They include:

- (1) Direct trade with South Korea. ||
- (2) Joint development of Siberia with his Pacific neighbors. ||
- (3) Interest in joining several Pacific economic organizations.
- (4) Limitations of the US Navy in the Pacific.
- (5) Choosing the Soviet Naval Base at Cam Ranh Bay in exchange for the closing of American bases in the Philippines. *Shavali for son further*
- (6) Turn a radar station into a center for space cooperation to resolve an ABM Treaty dispute.
- (7) USSR, China, Japan and Koreas discuss first freezing then || reducing naval and air forces.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly the Soviets want to participate in the economic growth of the Pacific. Plus they would like to do it with as little cost and at the same time improving their strategic position in the Pacific.

No one in East Asia and the Pacific is expected to jump at

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<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, speech given at Vladivostok, USSR, 28 July 1986, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 29 July, 1986, vol. 3, no. 145, (Soviet Union), pp. R1-20.

<sup>7</sup> Richard C. Holbrooke, "The 'Fortress' Opens", Newsweek, (17 October 1988), p. 42.

Gorbachev's proposals but time and public diplomacy are on his side.<sup>a</sup>

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Gorbachev  
He views  
a public diplo  
"on the  
side"

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<sup>a</sup> "Gorbachev casts his net again", Economist, (24 September 1988), p. 38.

## HISTORY AND STRATEGY

Historically, the Soviets have felt very vulnerable in the Far East. The Mongol invasion, the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, Imperial Japan in the 1940's, and the Sino-Soviet feud all have made Asia a source of threat to the Russians. The Soviet Union must look upon the Asian-Pacific region as a troubling one in which their growing interests remain frustrated and undernourished. Dr. Donald Zagoria has encapsulated several fears and insecurities which help shape Soviet policy in Asia today.<sup>9</sup> First, there is the fear of having to fight on two fronts if it comes to a general war. The Soviets vividly remember what might have happened in World War II. Second, there is the fear that one day a strong, huge, irredentist China may claim back the territories grabbed from a weak Manchu Empire by Czarist Russia in the middle of the 19th century. Third, there is a sensitivity about the vast borderlands with China. Is a powerful China likely to be reconciled to the Soviet domination of Mongolia? Fourth, there is the fear of a powerful Japan, already the third largest industrial power in the world, and a country with whom the Soviets have an unpleasant history and an intractable territorial dispute. Fifth, there is the concern about the geopolitical vulnerability of Siberia. Sixth, there is uncertainty about the loyalty of some 40 million Moslems in Soviet Central Asia at a time of an Islamic awakening

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<sup>9</sup> Donald Zagoria, "The Soviet-American Rivalry in Asia," ed. Marshall Shulman, East-West Tension in the Third World, (New York: Norton, 1986), pp. 84, 88-89.

on Russia's southern border.

Since World War II, the Soviet strategy for minimizing its two-front security problem has evolved in response to changing events and technological innovations. The Communist victory in China's civil war in 1949 seemed for a time to have resolved Moscow's two-front dilemma. The Sino-Soviet Alliance of 1950 created the friendly buffer state for the USSR in the Far East and the two-front security challenge for the United States. The breakdown of this alliance, however, in the summer of 1960 and China's subsequent raising of border issues along the 4,650-mile Sino-Soviet frontier as part of a broader political challenge to Soviet influence in Asia, reopened Moscow's concern about the security of its Far East provinces.<sup>10</sup>

It was in this context that the Brezhnev leadership, in 1965, initiated the first quantitative phase of its Asian military build-up, increasing ground forces in the Far East military districts from less than 20 divisions to more than 50 today. Military clashes along the disputed Sino-Soviet frontier in 1969 further deepened the Moscow-Beijing feud and ultimately compelled the Chinese leadership to improve relations with the United States, Japan, and Western Europe to avoid international isolation and build political counter-pressures against the mounting Soviet threat. This militarization of the Sino-Soviet conflict in concert

China  
papers  
1969  
1966

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<sup>10</sup> Georges Tan Eng Bok, "The USSR in East Asia," The Atlantic Papers, no. 59/60, (Paris: The Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, 1986), pp. 16-17.

with Soviet anticipation of China's normalization of relations with the United States and Japan, led the Soviets to initiate a second phase in their Asian military build-up in 1977.<sup>11</sup>

This second phase was designed not only to encircle China, but also to prepare for the possible formation of a U.S.-China-Japan security coalition against the Soviet Union. Thus in 1978 Moscow created an independent theater command for its Far East forces in the Siberian Military District. Simultaneously, it accelerated the expansion of its Pacific Fleet which is now the largest of the four Soviet fleets, and began to deploy its most modern aircraft and armor to the Far East.

Hanoi's victory in the Vietnamese civil war in 1975, and the rapid deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations in 1978, enabled Moscow to acquire use of former American naval and air bases at Cam Ranh Bay. Thus ensconced in Southeast Asia, the Soviets have been able to advance their military encirclement of China, and expanded their capability to project air and naval power south from Vladivostok to the Straits of Malacca, and into the Indian Ocean.<sup>12</sup>

This most recent phase of the Soviet-Asia Pacific military build-up has also involved Moscow's nuclear military forces. With the deployment of SS20 intermediate-range theater missile in 1977 and the deployment of medium-range BACKFIRE bombers,

<sup>11</sup> Michael McCune, "Soviet Presence in the Pacific," unpublished paper, pp. 1-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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Moscow created a quantitatively new threat to the U.S. Seventh Fleet, Allied Forces in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and ASEAN, and to a broad range of military/economic targets in China and other states throughout the Western Pacific. Moscow's Far East nuclear build-up presents a political as much as a military challenge to the Asian region. The new nuclear missiles and aircraft now located throughout the region seem designed as much for political intimidation as for deterring attacks on the Soviet Union's still lightly populated far eastern territories. Heightening of visible nuclear threat has been used by the Soviet leaders in conjunction with indigenous peace movements to raise fear among allies and friends in Asia about the de-coupling of the U.S. strategic deterrent from the defense of Asian Pacific.<sup>13</sup>

*good point!*

The role of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia and the Pacific has undergone several stages of development since the end of World War II. Initially, the Soviets merely ignored the area in favor of Eastern Europe where they were busy consolidating their control. Khrushchev reevaluated Stalin's policy of indifference and recognized that the area could be useful in attempting to improve Soviet influence in Southeast Asia through economic assistance. The basic Soviet objective in the region was either to expel the West or reduce its influence. With the sharpening of the Sino-Soviet dispute, Soviet policy in the region

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<sup>13</sup> Soviet Military Power, 1984, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1984), pp. 19-31.

was modified to include undermining China's influence and thwarting its ambitions.<sup>14</sup> Khrushchev, however, failed to mobilize the Asian Communist Parties against China, and by 1964, the Soviet Union was reducing its active role in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. For example, Hanoi at this time was adhering to the Beijing strategy of armed struggle rather than the parliamentary route advocated by the Soviets.<sup>15</sup> Brezhnev reversed this approach in 1965, and the role of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia was once again expanded through increased economic and military assistance as well as political support to North Vietnam.<sup>16</sup>

The Soviet's unabated military build-up has been paralleled by a series of political initiatives designed to heighten public anxiety about a regional arms race, yet it seeks to convince people that Soviet intentions are benign. These political initiatives include Brezhnev's 1969 proposal for an Asian collective security organization. This has recently been reformulated in Mikhail Gorbachev's 1985 call for an all-Asian

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<sup>14</sup> Georges Tan Eng Bok, "The USSR in East Asia," The Atlantic papers, no. 59/60, (Paris: The Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, 1986), pp. 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> G.T. Hsiao, The Rule of External Forces in the Indo-China Crisis, (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University, 1973), p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> Alvin Rubenstein, Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985), pp. 176-177.

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security conference; his July 1986 proposal at Vladivostok for an Asian Helsinki-type security conference; a series of proposals for Sino-Soviet non-aggression treaties; and most recently a proposal for Pacific nuclear-free zones.<sup>17</sup>

The Soviets are trying to use their military capabilities, especially their nuclear forces, for the political purpose of disrupting U.S. alliances. Moscow continues to play on anti-nuclear sentiment in the region, all the while probing for openings in the Pacific to project Soviet influence through military presence. The Soviets are doing what they can in the South Pacific to fan anti-nuclear feelings in the region and to drive a wedge between the U.S., our allies and friends.

*need to separate  
public diplomacy  
such as Asian  
collective security  
from actual political  
efforts to improve  
relations w/ China*

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev by Hirishi Kimura, British Broadcasting Corporation, 24 July 1987; "Soviet Focus on the Pacific, Problems of Communism, May-June 1987," pp. 12-13.



### SOVIET ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

Soviet initiatives to expand the presence of their commerce in the Pacific Basin have been extensive. In 1984 the Soviet Union switched its stance from one that was primarily based on intimidation to one that can be best described as courtship.<sup>18</sup>

Australia and New Zealand have both been offered economic initiatives of various types by the Soviet Union. Both nations have approached these offers warily since they are already acutely aware of the spread of Soviet presence and influence through ship repairs, fishing treaties, joint ventures, scientific research vessels, labor and peace group symposiums, and cruise line visits.<sup>19</sup>

All Pacific island nations need foreign capital investments to support growth. The island nations share common industries and exports; basically fishing, sugar, a little bit of mining, and tourism. The island nations remain Western-oriented and are pragmatic in their attitude. These societies are small and close-knit which does not lend itself well to Soviet intrigues and forces the islanders to examine Soviet offers in the context of economic advantages vice political desirability.<sup>20</sup>

An example is the Soviets attempts in 1985 to secure fishing

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<sup>18</sup> Georges Tan Eng Bok, "The USSR in East Asia," The Atlantic Papers, no. 59/60, (Paris: The Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, 1986), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Hanson "Pentagon Worries About Rising Soviet Tide in Pacific," Reuters, 3 July 1986.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Chuck Downs, Office of the Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), East Asia/Pacific Region, Washington, DC, July 1987.

There have always been aspects of it

Soviet have little to offer

rights when the American Tunaboat Associations' relations with the island governments of the South Pacific were at a low point. The South Pacific Forum Fishing Agency, representing the 16 fishing nations of the region, was asking for \$20 million for an agreement in which the United States would have been given access to all the nations' Exclusive Economic Zones.<sup>21</sup> While the U.S. deliberated into 1986 over the final technical details of the treaty, the Soviets approached almost all of these independent island nations with their own offers. Finally, because of economic pressures, Kiribati could not resist the Soviet Union's offer of fees almost double to those being offered by other foreign fishing nations.<sup>22</sup> Lessened rhetoric of the Soviet emissaries and wisely timed attempts to joint the Pacific Economic Co-operation Conference aided the credibility of the Soviet effort. Combined with warnings of the threat of U.S. military presence and the lack of American investment, the Soviet offer seemed attractive. The following year when the Soviets offered less than 50% for more fishing rights and port access, their offer was turned down by Kiribati.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Scott Allen, "The South Pacific: Setting Priorities," Proceedings, 13.7 (July, 1987), p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Gardner, "Soviet Union in the South Pacific," Asian Defense Journal, (August, 1987), p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> The Economist, (London, September 25, 1986), p. 6.

In 1987 Vanuatu accepted a fishing treaty with the Soviet Union. The Soviets will pay Vanuatu \$1.5 million, and Vanuatu will give the Soviet Union fishing rights, port access on a regular basis, and transshipment of fish products for one year.<sup>24</sup>

The Soviets have realized, as Mahan did 100 years ago, that a merchant marine itself could become a source of strategic and political influence through its capacity to transport men, equipment, and goods.<sup>25</sup> Even more important is the fact that expansion of the merchant fleet provides a way to increase influence while emphasizing economic cooperation and downplaying the role of actual naval-military forces. The USSR's commercial presence has increased through their offers of economic benefits from ship repair business, fishing agreements, joint ventures, and extensive cruise line business. Politically, the Soviets have emphasized to the nations of the Pacific that their proposals are commercial in nature, while the only interests that the United States has are military. Past neglect of the region by the U.S. increased the potential for this line of reasoning to be persuasive. However, increased interest by the U.S., as well as the Soviet attempt to quickly and heavy-handedly expand their economic foothold in Kiribati, and later Vanuatu, have negated Soviet gains. The USSR is finding it increasingly difficult to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Godfrey Till, Maritime Strategy in the Nuclear Age, 2d. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 76.

find partners for its strategically minded commercial agreements.<sup>26</sup>

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*explan*

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<sup>26</sup> William Branigin, "Soviet Military Operations Seen Increasing in the Pacific," Washington Post, 1 August 1986, pp. 17.

### GEOPOLITICAL INITIATIVES

The Soviet Union has attempted to improve its geopolitical situation by adopting a conciliatory cooperative policy and degrading the position of the U.S. in the region. They are attempting to do this not only directly, but also through third parties such as Libya and Vietnam. Directly, the Soviet policy for the region has focused on (1) peace and regional security; (2) improving its diplomatic relations; (3) strengthening scientific and cultural cooperation; and, (4) taking advantage of regional differences between Asia-Pacific and the U.S.

The Soviets are posing as peacemakers to: a) undermine popular support in the Asian-Pacific countries to respond to Soviet threat; b) sow doubts concerning desirability of continued H.S. presence in the region; and, c) deflect attention away from Soviet military build-up and interventionism in the region. An example of this is Gorbachev's willingness to dismantle the Soviet facilities at Cam Ranh Bay in return for termination of U.S. presence in the Philippines. Such a swap would reduce U.S. capability to support ASEAN against the Soviet-Vietnamese clients and destabilize the Philippine economy.<sup>27</sup>

The Soviet Union signed the Protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty. It was the first nuclear power to sign the Protocols, and every attempt was made by the Soviet Union to gain propaganda leverage to further Soviet anti-nuclear credentials

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Weiss, "Soviet Ambitions in the Far East," International Defense Review, (December, 1986), pp. 1751-1754.

in the region. When the Soviet Union signed the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Protocols 2 and 3, on December 15, 1986, it accompanied its signature with a conditionalizing statement which meant that the Soviets could ignore the Protocols with any nation that allowed U.S. Navy ship visits.<sup>28</sup>

*You need to  
deal with "free-  
ness" of Soviet  
initiation  
in the region*

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<sup>28</sup> Scott Allen, "The South Pacific: Setting Priorities," Proceedings, 13.7 (July, 1987), p. 54.

### DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The Soviet Union has adopted a humble posture and lessened its criticism of the foreign policies of ASEAN, Australia, and New Zealand. It maintains that Asia-Pacific countries and the USSR should seek common ground while reserving their differences and says that it will not impose its ideology on them. It acknowledges U.S. interest in the region. A good impression is presented so the Asia-Pacific countries will recognize its role and permit its influence in the area. The importance the Soviets place on improved relations in the region is typified by the Soviet Foreign Minister Schevardnadze's goodwill tour of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific in early 1987--the first of its kind to the region.<sup>29</sup>

### SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL COOPERATION

The Soviet Union has established an aggressive policy for the region with respect to exchanges that help enhance their image. Soviet oceanographic ships have crisscrossed the region making surveys, sharing information and attempting to gain permission to enter territorial waters. For the first time, the Soviets are offering people from the region educational and cultural opportunities in the USSR.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Private Interview with Richard Schiff, Department of the Navy, Plans and Policy Division, Ocean Policy Branch, Washington, DC, July 1987.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Harsch, "Gorbachev Faces Asia and Launches a New Diplomacy," Christian Science Monitor, (1 August 1986), p. 9; George Terkovich, "The Soviet Union, Moscow Turns East," Atlantic, (December, 1987), p. 30.

### REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Moscow intends to take advantage of regional differences, instability, and contradictions between Asia-Pacific countries and the United States. They intend to encourage discord in the United States and to further their own aims. Examples of this are South Pacific Nuclear Free-Zones Protocol signing, New Zealand ship access, and economic protectionism.<sup>31</sup>

### EXTERNAL DISRUPTIONS

(A) In addition to capitalizing on indigenous situations to advance their own policy, Soviets also attempt to take advantage of externally generated disruptions. While infrequently acting as a surrogate for the USSR, by the nature of their "foreign policy", Libya advances the Soviet goal of separating the region from the U.S. Throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific area Libya seeks to support and exploit Islamic Fundamentalist movements, destabilize moderate pro-West governments, and spread this revolutionary message. Libyan support comes in the form of money, training, and other encouragements for revolutionaries, separatists, and disaffected groups.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Private Interview with Chuck Downs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), East Asia and Pacific Region, July 1987; Jai Bei, "A Look at Gorbachev, Asia-Pacific Policy," Beijing Review, no. 41, (12 October 1987), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> "Australia Orders Closure of Libya's Mission," Reuters, 19 May 1987; Private Interview with Chuck Downs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), East Asia and Pacific Region, July 1987; "Libyan Issues Divides the Pacific," Defense and Foreign Affairs Weekly, vol. xiii,

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Libya has been providing military training for small groups of New Caledonian Kanaks, Vanuatu radicals, Irian Java separatists, and reportedly others from the area. Money and weapons are channeled through the Libyan People's Bureaus Trade Missions and other fronts. Libya has People's Bureaus in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and a Trade Mission in Vanuatu.<sup>33</sup>

In April of 1987, Qadaffi held a conference of Pacific revolution in Tripoli, and representatives from 13 Pacific countries were invited. A Pacific lobby in Tripoli is well-financed and close to Qadaffi. In addition, a Libyan Trade Mission has been active in the South Pacific trying to expand and establish ties.<sup>34</sup>

#### SOVIET MILITARY STRATEGY

East Asia is a maritime region and it will take maritime supremacy to control its destiny. Land communications in East Asia are rudimentary and limited in capacity and the terrain is hostile. The great majority of all commerce, both within the region and between Asia and other parts of the world, must travel by sea. Controlling the sealanes of communication is equivalent to exerting

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no. 19, (18 May 1987), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

a controlling interest in the development of East Asia.<sup>35</sup>

A cursory look at the geography of the region shows that the strategically dominant features of the region are the series of interior seas which stretch from the Straits of Malacca at the south to the Kamchatka Peninsula on the north. Enclosed by a long series of offshore island chains, these seas are the commercial arteries of the Far East.

The strategic implications of the geographic arrangement of the region are profound. Air power will probably determine control of the seas. This includes shore installations capable of firing antiship cruise missiles at maritime targets and naval surface units equipped with anti-air missile systems. The antisubmarine warfare problem will be vastly more complicated than it was in the Second World War, with conventional torpedo-firing submarines joined by nuclear attack submarines and cruise missile firing submarines. The surface forces opposing the submarines will be augmented by highly capable air units, both fixed and rotary-wing, which must be provided with protection from enemy fighter aircraft.

Mine warfare forces could be especially effective in restricted waters of the various choke points, and capable mine countermeasure forces will be absolutely necessary for the preservation of free passage against mines placed by surface, submarine, or air forces.

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<sup>35</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, The Political Uses of Sea Power (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 61-63, 79.

The Soviet maritime, military presence in the Asian-Pacific region has increased dramatically in recent times. It encompasses a balanced tactical and strategic threat with formidable capabilities above, below, and on the surface of the Pacific. The modern Soviet Pacific fleet is its nation's largest, far larger than the U.S. Seventh Fleet, its likely rival.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the Soviet build-up has been qualitative as well as quantitative. The creation of a separate Far Eastern theater command organization in 1978 points to this direction. In the past eight years, the number of nuclear submarines has increased from 41 to 69, bringing the total number of general purpose submarines in the Pacific fleet to over 100.<sup>37</sup> Major surface combatants have also increased from 64 to 84.<sup>38</sup>

The Soviet base at Cam Ranh Bay appears to play a significant role in the increased regional naval presence and the utilization of their enlarged Pacific fleet. From 1965 to 1978, Soviet ship days in the area increased from 920 to 6,920. In the period of

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<sup>36</sup> John Lehman, "Successful Naval Strategy in the Pacific: How We Are Achieving It, How We Can Afford It," Naval War College Review, 40.1 (Winter, 1987), p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Dion W. Johnson. BEAR Tracks in Indochina: An Analysis of Soviet Presence in Indochina, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1987), p. 57.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with James Lyons by Proceedings, 13.7 (July, 1987), p. 67.

1978 to 1983, they almost doubled again to 12,800.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the base in Vietnam has enabled Moscow to increase the reach of airborne reconnaissance and ASW capabilities from Taiwan to the Philippines.<sup>40</sup> Offensive aircraft have also appeared. In 1983 the first naval strike aircraft to deploy outside the USSR since 1972 appeared at Cam Ranh, and in 1984 MIG-23 fighter aircraft augmented these forces. In short, Soviet maritime forces have been gradually increasing in number and quality, and thus far have formed the foundation of an everpresent potential threat in the Asian-Pacific region.<sup>41</sup>

#### CAM RANH BAY, VIETNAM

In 1975 the Soviets requested use of Vietnamese air and naval bases; Vietnam refused. Over the next four years, frequent official Soviet attempts to gain access to Vietnam failed. Soviet naval activity in the South China Sea during that time was minimal and consisted primarily of oceanographic research vessels and units transiting to and from the Indian Ocean.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> U.S., Congress, House, Committee on the Armed Services, Defense Department Authorization and Oversight. Hearing on DOD Authorization for Fiscal Year 1984, by Robert L. Long, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), p. 1240.

<sup>40</sup> Soviet Military Power, 1985, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense [1985]), p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon, The Soviet Union in the Third World: Threat to World Peace?, (New York: Pergamon-Drassey, 1986), pp. 61-64.

<sup>42</sup> Rajan Menon, "The Soviet Union in East Asia," Current History, vol. 82, (October 1983), pp. 339-343.

In November of 1978, Vietnam and the USSR signed a Friendship Treaty. The December 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and February 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war resulted in the first substantial Soviet presence in Vietnam.<sup>43</sup>

Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities between Vietnam and China, Soviet reconnaissance aircraft were sent into the region. Shortly thereafter, a Naval Task Group deployed to the South China Sea. Since then, the Soviet presence in Vietnam has increased dramatically, most notable at Cam Ranh Bay where U.S.-built air and naval facilities provided a ready base for Soviet activity.<sup>44</sup>

Soviet air presence at Cam Ranh has grown <sup>markedly</sup> impressively. In 1980, two BEAR Delta reconnaissance aircraft and two BEAR Foxtrot ASW aircraft were continuously forward deployed at Cam Ranh. The Soviet Navy has begun using the port facilities and airfields at Cam Ranh Bay to an unprecedented extent. Those facilities now support the operation of an average of 20 to 25 warships and auxiliaries in the South China Sea augmented by naval BEAR Delta reconnaissance and BEAR Foxtrot ASW aircraft flying from Vietnam airfields. In 1983 the first naval strike aircraft to be deployed outside the Soviet Union since 1972 appeared at Cam Ranh Bay. Thus far, about ten strike tanker and electronic combat

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<sup>43</sup> Vietnam Background Notes, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Brendan M. Greeley, Jr., "Soviets Extend Air Sea Power with Build-up at Cam Ranh Bay," Aviation Week and Technology, 2 March 1987, p. 76.

variants of the medium range BADGER have also deployed and some are capable of carrying anti-ship cruise missiles. MIG-23 fighter aircraft augmented these forces in late 1984, adding substantially to the Soviet capability to defend that base.<sup>45</sup>

In the first year following the SRV-PRC border clash, economic aid from the USSR to Vietnam doubled and military aid increased roughly tenfold. The Soviets continue to send high levels of aid to Vietnam, estimated at \$3 million per day and totaling over \$9 billion in economic assistance, and \$9 billion in military assistance since 1978. Soviet aid helps Hanoi counter the Chinese threat and sustain its military forces at approximately 1.2 million men equipped with Soviet arms. The Vietnamese, however, have been unable to get their country's economy moving once again. Without Soviet aid, the country would economically collapse.<sup>46</sup> Cam Ranh Bay has vastly improved the Soviet military capabilities in the region, and allows continuous Soviet naval presence in the South China Sea. It facilitates the transit of Soviet vessels to and from the Indian Ocean, increases the Soviet surveillance capability against U.S. forces, and increases the potential for Soviet interdiction of Pacific/Indian Ocean SLOCs. The Soviet presence also has had political impact in Southeast Asia. It clearly demonstrates Soviet interest in the

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<sup>45</sup>James Lyons, Transcript of Press Conference given in Sydney, Australia, 9 February 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon, The Soviet Union in the Third World: Threat to World Peace?, (New York: Pergamon-Drassey, 1986), p. 119.

region and serves as a reminder of Soviet power to surrounding nations.<sup>47</sup>

In Australia, the Soviet Union's Minister Counselor in Canberra claimed in the newspaper that there was no Soviet naval base in Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay. Two weeks later at a press conference, ADM Lyons, then Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, displayed photographs showing the Soviet base at Cam Ranh Bay, causing Soviet denials of the existence of a military base to collapse completely. ADM Lyons said at a press conference in Sydney, that this force was part of a permanent deployment averaging 20 to 30 warships, and three submarines on-station at any one time. The facilities make Cam Ranh Bay the biggest deployment of Soviet forces outside the Soviet Union. It had resulted in what he termed the most dramatic change in the world strategic outlook since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> This was just another example of Soviet ineptitude in foreign political relations by having one of their senior embassy people make a bald-faced lie, not once, but repeatedly, to the Australian press. The Soviet Union set themselves up for a politically embarrassing situation.

However, the fact remains that Soviet access to Vietnamese territory has greatly strengthened its intelligence capabilities

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Weiss, "Soviet Ambitions in the Far East," Soviet National Defense Review, (December, 1986), p. 1754.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon. The Soviet Union in the Third World--Threat to World Peace?, (New York: Pergamon-Drassey, 1986), p. 119.

and enabled a continuous naval presence in the South China Sea and through the Straits of Malacca. In addition, the Cam Ranh Bay complex 2,200 miles closer to the Indian Ocean than Vladivostok and 3,800 miles closer than Petropavlosk.<sup>49</sup>

The Soviet presence in Cam Ranh Bay coupled with Soviet support for the Republic of Socialist Vietnam's expansionist policies, is the major regional security concern for the ASEAN nations. Vietnam, whose economy would be in a shambles without Soviet aid, occupies Laos and Cambodia with their armed forces. They maintain a major portion of their forces in close proximity to the Thai border. This force is a constant threat to Thailand and the stability of the region.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Weiss, "Soviet Ambitions in the Far East," International Defense Review, (December, 1986), p. 1754.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph G. Whelan and Michael J. Dixon, The Soviet Union in The Soviet Union in the Third World: Threat to World Peace? (New York: Pergamon-Drassey, 1986), pp. 116-117.



## CONCLUSION

Five years ago the Soviets believed they saw an unexploited opportunity in the Asian-Pacific region. They perceived a primarily militaristic American foreign policy as vulnerable to a well balanced Soviet initiative. This initiative concentrated on reducing visible military power outside the Soviet Union while building its political capital and ties with the region's nations. This was to be done using careful economic and diplomatic incentives, all while developing the capability to deter American military strengths through the possible disruption of vital allied SLOCs and deterrence of a second front possibility. This is the goal of Soviet actions in the Pacific. Since Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech, the Soviets have been paying more attention to the Pacific and have adopted a sophisticated version of carrot and stick. On one hand they pursue actions the Soviets hope the world regards as conciliatory. Moscow sent Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze on a goodwill tour of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific in early 1987 and observers for the first time to the semi-official Pacific Economic Cooperation Council Meeting in Vancouver. They concluded a fishing agreement with Vanuatu which improved on the terminated pact with Kiribati by giving the Soviets limited access to the island's port facilities to support their fishing fleet. Soviet Union was the first nuclear power to endorse the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Protocols. On the other hand, the Soviets continue to intimidate the region with 26 massive force

build-up. During his visit to Vladivostok Gorbachev celebrated Soviet Navy Day by reviewing warships of the Soviet Pacific Fleet visibly underscoring Soviet power in the Pacific. Not long afterwards, in August, there was a major Soviet Pacific fleet exercise. During his visit to Hanoi, Soviet Politburo member Ligachev reassured the Vietnamese of continued Soviet support and promised that any improvement in Sino-Soviet relations would not come at Vietnam's expense. What is all this for? No nation in the Far East has any aggressive intentions toward the Soviet Union. The Chinese might fight a defensive war and Japan has no offensive power. If there is a Soviet object, it must be to overawe the small states of Southeast Asia and the Pacific for political and economic gain. The nations of the Pacific need to be wary of Soviets bearing gifts. Gorbachev is serious about domestic reform and recognizes this part of the world as a fast growing, lucrative market. If he can produce benefits for the Soviet economy at little or no cost, then so much the better. But, it will be on Soviet terms and for the ultimate benefit of the Soviet Union.

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